



Feed the Future Country Fact Sheet

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Guns, Honey and Rice

Thompson Tembo served two years in prison for wildlife poaching, bore scars of a buffalo goring, and lived in poverty while working in the illegal animal trade. He felt he had no choice. Poaching was all he knew how to do, and his only source of income and food for his family.

Now over 60 years old, Tembo grew up in Zambia's Luangwa Valley on the edges of a vast national game reserve where his father was killed by an elephant more than 30 years ago. The elder poacher passed his knowledge on to his son.

With very little formal education, poaching was Tembo's only skill. He began killing warthogs and other small game for food in his late teens. In his 20s, he began killing elephants and trading their tusks for food and clothing. When he was in his 40s, Tembo was killing 20 elephants a year and selling their tusks for \$10—tusks that were worth 1,000 times as much on the black market. By the time he reached age 50, Tembo spent most of his time away from his family—in the bush, poaching or hiding from the authorities—with very little to show for it.

In 2003, he learned of a local non-profit organization called Community Markets for Conservation, or **COMACO**, that was working with poachers, as well as charcoal producers (who illegally cut down trees to produce charcoal) to teach them conservation farming as an alternative means of survival.

Tembo traded in his gun. Today he makes a good living as a beekeeper and rice farmer. He recently bought a grinding mill that he operates as a small business with his wife.

"I cry when I think of all the wild animals I killed to better myself, but instead remained poor and made my community poorer from the loss of this resource," Tembo says. "COMACO opened my eyes to a better life and gave me the tools to change my life, and I have committed myself to helping others like me to put down their guns."

No Better Choice

In Zambia's Eastern province, almost 80 percent of the population lives on less than \$1.25 a day. Half are undernourished.

"In the absence of skills, inputs and markets, what alternatives were there but to poach, if families living near wildlife areas had to survive?" says Dale Lewis, an American elephant biologist-turned-conservationist who has lived and worked in Zambia for more than 20 years.

He founded COMACO in 2003 as a new approach to conservation in Zambia that recognizes hunger and survival as the underlying reasons why people like Tembo resort to poaching and other forms of resource exploitation.

"It was time to get bold and take on this challenge," says Lewis.

But COMACO needed a market for these farmers to sell the crops they were learning to grow—things like peanuts, rice, soy and honey.

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